# Indian English - an emerging epicentre? A pilot study on light verbs in web-derived corpora of South Asian Englishes

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# INDIAN ENGLISH – AN EMERGING EPICENTRE? A PILOT STUDY ON LIGHT VERBS IN WEB-DERIVED CORPORA OF SOUTH ASIAN ENGLISHES

*Abstract*: In research into New Englishes, it has been suggested that English has turned into a genuinely pluricentric language in the late 20th century and that various regionally relevant norm-developing centres have emerged that exert an influence on the formation and development of the English language in neighbouring areas. In the present paper, we focus on Indian English (IndE), the largest institutionalised second-language variety of English, and its potential role as an emerging epicentre in South Asia. Specifically, we are interested in determining to what extent IndE as the dominant variety in the region shapes the norms in Standard(ising) Englishes in the neighbouring countries. The data for a case study on light verb constructions were retrieved from large web-derived corpora with texts from national English-medium newspapers in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka – countries that all once formed part of the British colonial empire in South Asia and that have retained the English language as a communicative vehicle, albeit to different extents. Our insights from web-derived corpora open up new perspectives for the description of the closeness and distance between Indian English on the one hand and English in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka on the other.

## 1. Introduction: English as a Pluricentric Language

The concept of 'pluricentricity', introduced by Kloss (1978), refers to languages that have more than one centre (in the sense of norm-producing area and, accordingly, regional standard form). Present-day English is probably the best example of a pluricentric language. Without any doubt, in the early 21st century the two most dominant – and primary – centres of English on a global scale are still Britain and the United States because of their pivoting role in the past global spread of English: "The position of English in the world today is thus the joint outcome of Britain's colonial expansion and the more recent activity of the US" (Graddol 2000, 9). In addition to Britain and the United States, however, other native varieties have also developed into norm-producing secondary centres in their own right with their own endo-normative standards, some of which may also serve as a model for their particular regions. They are called 'epicentres' by Leitner (1992).[1] His two-volume publication on *Australia's Many Voices*

[1] Note that Pakir (2001, 7f.) uses the term synonymously with 'regional standard', i.e. without the notion of a new, local source of influence on neighbouring varieties.

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argues for the epicentral role that present-day Australian English fulfils: English in Australia is "a national language, an epi-centre of English inside the Asia-Pacific region. It is starting to act as a regional player there and may eventually compete with American and British English" (Leitner 2004, 1). This characterisation of the status and role of present-day Australian English makes it clear that the concept of epicentre includes two components, an internal and an external one.[2] On the one hand, an epicentre is marked internally by endo-normative stabilisation, i.e. by the wide-spread use, general acceptance and codification of the local norms of English. Among others, Schneider (2003, 269; 2007, 123ff.) convincingly argues that Australian English has already reached this stage in its evolutionary development. On the other hand, an epicentre should also have the potential to serve as a model of English for neighbouring countries, i.e. exert an influence on other speech communities in the region and, thus, challenge – to some extent at least – the all-encompassing gate-keeping function of British English (BrE) and American English (AmE).

It is not only L1 varieties such as Australian English that can develop into new epicentres. According to Leitner (1992, 225), this is also possible for institutionalised second-language varieties of English, even though English is a non-native language in such ESL speech communities: "The emergence of SL [second language] centres is […] to be expected. Epicentres have already been recognized in India, Singapore and other areas" (Leitner 1992, 225). An article in *The Guardian Weekly* [23 May 2008, "Learning English", p. 3] reported on the plan of the Sri Lankan government to use English language teaching (ELT) materials from India and take advantage of India's long-established expertise in the area of ELT for the future development of Sri Lanka's English language policy. In this article, the coordinator of the new Sri Lankan ELT initiative, Sunimal Fernando, is quoted as follows: "India has emerged as the country which now has the most successful methods for teaching job-oriented English – English without the social and cultural baggage."[3] This assessment of the potential language-pedagogical role of India corroborates the potential of India and Indian English (IndE) as an emerging epicentre of English in South Asia in the future.

In this paper, we focus on present-day Standard IndE and its potential status as an emergent epicentre of English in South Asia. There is a rich body of literature indicating that IndE has developed local norms at virtually all linguistic levels, including not only the seminal work by Kachru (1983, 2005) and the largely intuition-based dictionaries by Nihalani *et al.* (1979, 2004), but also corpus-based studies, e.g. by Shastri (1988, 1996)

[2] For a similar definition of the term 'epicentre' as involving two dimensions (in analogy with its etymological source), see Peters (2009).

[3] See also Leitner (2004, 343) who argues that AusE does not carry the imperialist connotations of BrE or AmE and might therefore be a better exonormative model in post-colonial contexts.

and Sedlatschek (2009). According to Mair and Mollin (2007, 345), corpus data provide a very important tool for the assessment of variety status:

> Firstly, the corpus is subjected to a test of difference, i.e. it is compared to other corpora, and most importantly to a corpus of the native speaker input variety, in order to measure the structural differences and similarities between the varieties. Secondly, regarding those features that appear to mark a new variety, a corpus-internal examination of coherence is called for. Deviations from other varieties need to be communal rather than idiosyncratic in order to merit a categorisation as variety-specific marker.

Research into various corpora of Indian English, including the Kolhapur Corpus, the Indian component of the International Corpus of English (ICE) and, more recently, large web-derived corpora of IndE have shown that IndE differs systematically from British English, the historical input variety, and that these differences are consistent within IndE. For the assessment of variety status, it is also necessary to find out what IndE speakers' attitudes towards the localised variant of English is: "New standards need to be standards in the mind, too" (Mair & Mollin 2007, 347). In this respect, too, sociolinguistic studies indicate that IndE is increasingly accepted as a full-fledged variety by Indian speakers (see Kachru 2005). In the light of corpus-linguistic and sociolinguistic evidence, we can safely assume present-day IndE to have reached the stage of endo-normative stabilisation (see Mukherjee 2007).

What has so far been neglected in corpus-linguistic (and, one should add, sociolinguistic) research is the question of whether (and to what extent) IndE is indeed also an emergent epicentre from an external perspective. That is, does IndE also exert an influence on the development of English in neighbouring countries where the status of English is not as clearly defined as in India and where we find much smaller groups of speakers of English as a second language? More specifically, is there *linguistic* evidence for an emerging lead role of IndE for the neighbouring varieties in South Asia? In the light of these questions, we conducted a pilot study of national English-medium newspapers across South Asia, including newspapers from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.[4] In this study, we focus on light-verb constructions (LVCs) such as *have a look*, i.e. constructions that combine a semantically empty 'light' verb (e.g. *have*) and a noun derived from the corresponding verb by conversion (e.g. *look*).

[4] We are of course aware of the fact that in the case of Pakistan, geographical proximity is unlikely to have an impact to the same extent as in the case of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka: although India and Pakistan are neighbouring countries, they are not institutionally linked; furthermore, due to the historical background of both countries as well as the latent political conflicts in the region it is to be expected that speakers in Pakistan would in fact more likely strive for linguistic difference than convergence. For a critical evaluation of the theoretical underpinnings and methodological aspects of the epicentre concept, see Hundt (forthcoming).

It should not go unmentioned at this point that it is open to discussion if and to what extent a synchronic comparison of varieties can provide sufficient evidence for or against the epicentre hypothesis. In her discussion of Australian English, for example, Peters (2009) suggests that it is only by tracing diachronic developments in neighbouring varieties that the formation of a new epicentre can be identified. In contrast, we argue that a potential epicentral function of IndE in the South Asian context may also be inferred from degrees of similarity between a specific dominant variety on the one hand (i.e. British English or Indian English) and peripheral varieties on the other (e.g. Sri Lankan English and Pakistani English), e.g. with regard to lexico-grammatical markers such as LVCs. Also, it is a fact that large-scale comparable diachronic databases of the individual South Asian varieties are not available. The present study should thus also be seen as a pilot study of the potential (and the limitations) of a synchronic corpus-based approach to the validation of the epicentre status of a New English variety.

In part two of our paper, we will introduce the lexico-grammatical structure that we investigate. We will then move on to present our database, which includes large web-derived newspaper corpora of South Asian Englishes. The corpus findings are discussed in part three of our paper. Here, our focus is on capturing the relative closeness or distance between the varieties that we analyse in order to assess the potential lead role of IndE as an epicentre with regard to the use of LVCs in South Asia. We conclude that our findings are certainly compatible with the hypothesis that IndE is a model variety for other Englishes in the region. However, we can also observe a considerable degree of heterogeneity across the different South Asian varieties, which suggests that a range of factors in fact interact. As a consequence, this pilot study clearly highlights the need for further research on a larger and more comprehensive scale.

## 2. Testing the Epicentre Hypothesis: Focus on Light-Verb Constructions

We decided to look at LVCs (see Huddleston & Pullum 2002, 290–6)[5] because they are likely to offer insights into two aspects that are of inter-

[5] What we refer to as 'light verbs' has been studied under various terms, such as 'group verbs' (Poutsma 1926) or, most recently, 'stretched verb constructions' (Allerton 2002, based on Heringer 1989). A commonly used term is 'verbo-nominal phrases' or 'constructions' (Renský 1966; Hoffmann 1972; Akimoto 1989; Stein 1991; Stein & Quirk; Quirk 1995; Labuhn 2001). Live (1973) simply calls them '*take-have*-phrasals'. Alternative terms are 'expanded predicate' (Algeo 1995), 'periphrastic' or 'complex verbal structures' (Wierzbicka 1982 and Nickel 1968, respectively), 'eventive object constructions' (Quirk *et al.* 1985) or 'support verb constructions' (Krenn 2000). In generative grammar, the pattern has been labelled

est for the study of New Englishes: (a) the relation between local features and (potentially) local norms, and (b) the process of nativisation. Some LVCs in IndE, such as *have/take a look* are shared with BrE and AmE;[6] others, such as *give a chase to sb.*, are typical of IndE (and might be found in other L2 varieties of English). But before we move on to the data from our web-derived corpora, let us first define the variable more closely.

### *2.1 Definition of the variable*

Instead of simple verbs like *look*, *bite* or *hug*, a semantically reduced verb like *have*, *take* or *give* can be combined with the indefinite article and a deverbal[7] noun, as in (1):

(1) a. Let's *have a look* at the next two sentences. (ICE-India, s2b 026)
b. Before you arrest her, *take a look* at these photographs. (ICE-India w2e 003)
c. They would not hesitate to *give* traffic offenders *a chase*. (ICE-India w2c 016)

*Have* and *take* typically take deverbal nouns that are intransitive whereas *give* can take forms of both transitive and intransitive verbs as its deverbal complement noun.

The verb *have* combines with deverbal nouns such as *chat*, *drink*, *fall*, *glance*, *glimpse*, *laugh*, *look*, *nap*, *shower*, *stroll*, *talk*, *taste* and *walk*, to give but a few examples of constructions typically found in standard BrE and AmE. This variety of possible combinations suggests that we are dealing with a fairly productive construction type.[8] The fact that nouns like *neglect*, *eat*, or *jump* cannot be used in the construction (at least in inner-

as 'complex predicate' (a sub-type of 'composite predicates' in Cattell 1984) or 'object idiom chunks' (a more widely used generative term). For a generative account, see Radford (1988, 422). The terminological variation also reflects a problem with the definition of the phenomenon. On closer inspection, most of the terms include other phenomena than just the *have a look* or *take a bite* construction; Renský (1966, 290), for instance, includes idioms such as *to become master*, *to be head of*, *to cut with a lathe*, in his category of 'verbo-nominal phrases'. In a more recent paper, Trousdale (2008) focuses on light verbs with gerundial nouns (e.g. *He gave him a kicking*).

[6] For the stable regional variation in these two varieties, see Leech *et al.* (2009, 166ff.); for light verbs in Australian and New Zealand English, see Smith (2009).

[7] We are aware of the problem that directionality poses for the process of conversion. One example to illustrate this is the LVC *give sb. a text* that is probably coined in analogy to *give somebody a call*. While *call* is definitely a deverbal noun, *text* could be seen as having been converted first into a verb (e.g. *to text someone*) and then back into a noun, but *text* in *give sb. a text* is obviously not a typical deverbal noun.

[8] Dixon (2005, 460) claims that a quarter of the 700 most common English verbs can be used in a LVC.

circle varieties) indicates that the productivity is limited to a certain extent by collocational restrictions; restrictions that might not apply in the same way in the varieties of the outer circle.

As the first type of LVC (those shared with, for instance, BrE and AmE), we looked at all instances of the verbs *have*, *take* and *give*, immediately followed by the indefinite article and a deverbal noun that is derived by conversion and thus isomorphic with the verb.[9] In other words, we excluded patterns such as *have a thought* or *have an argument*.[10] Instances with a non-derived isomorphic noun, on the other hand, would be included:

(2) a. Distraction can help – *have a think* about the sort of antenatal care and birth you'd like. (<www.babycenter.in/stages/0106, 14.9.2007>)
b. […] just *have a think* about what we did and what we didn't do and find ways in which we can all improve ourselves for Friday. (<www.cricket247.in/2020worldcup/news/zimbabwe-loss-was-wake-up-call-ponting, 14.9.2007>)

The condition that the simplex verb and the derived noun be isomorphic, in our view, also applies to the following example where the particle has been prefixed to the verb:

(3) This helps tremendously to *take* a deep *inbreathe* without any strain […]. (ICE-India, s2a 055)

However, we did not systematically include these prefixed verbs in our searches. Isomorphism of verb and noun should not lead us to include instances which are only superficially similar to LVCs, namely instances where *have*, for instance, is used with its lexical meaning, as in *I had a bad cough*. Furthermore, we followed Dixon (2005) in excluding patterns where there was no adjective-adverb correspondence. In the following examples, *good*, *certain* and *second* cannot be replaced by the corresponding adverbs *well*, *certainly* and *secondly* without turning them into ungrammatical or semantically different sentences; they were therefore excluded:

(4) a. Because take a *good* look which countries are producing the most destructive weapons. (ICE- India, s1b-019)
b. […] the general […] took a *certain* risk by allowing the opening up of old memories. (*The Statesman*, 29.3.2005)

[9] This is a point on which *have, take* and *give* differ from *make* which is also used as a light verb, but mostly with derived rather than converted deverbal nouns, as in *make an appointment* or *make an enquiry* (see Dixon 2005, 461).

[10] We did include instances where a non-derived noun co-occurred with an isomorphic deverbal noun, as in "Villagers have been asked to *take medicines and take rest* after the disease is diagnosed, the CMOH added" (*The Statesman*, 14.10.2003), or "'[…] we will also host the Women Entrepreneur of the Year Awards ceremony shortly which would also *give further recognition and a boost* to women in the country', she said" (*Daily News*, Sri Lanka, 31.8.2004).

c. […] cases of AIDS infection due to blood transfusion have made scientists to take a *second* look at blood transfusion. (ICE-India, s2b 037)

(4)' a. *Because look *well* [at] which countries are producing the most destructive weapons.
b. […] the general […] *certainly* risked [something] by allowing the opening up of old memories.
c. *[…] cases of AIDS infection due to blood transfusion have made scientists to look *secondly* at blood transfusion.

We also excluded all instances with adjectives that do not have a corresponding adverb and where the corresponding construction with a simplex verb would have to make use of a circumlocution. In the following instance, *friendly* could only be replaced by *in a friendly way* with a simplex verb:

(5) Meanwhile, the Congress and the PMK may end up having a "*friendly fight*" for the lone Pondicherry seat […]. (*The Statesman*, 4.2.2004)

In cases where adjective and adverb can have the same form (e.g. *hard*), premodified LVCs were included in our data sets:

(6) If they *take a hard look* at the philosophy behind their nominations, they will realize that they have a special responsibility to discharge. (*The Statesman*, 17.3.2003)

De-verbal nouns can be modified not only by a simple adjective (as in example 7a) that would be modified with an adverb in a construction with an equivalent simplex verb (i.e. *she looked coquettishly*); they can also be followed by a post-modifying relative clause (as in example 7b). While admittedly rare, examples (7c) and (7d) illustrate even more complex clausal modification patterns.

(7) a. She gave me *a coquettish look*.
b. She gave me *a look that was coquettish* in a naive sort of way. (Nickel 1968, 15)
c. Mary gave John *her 'I told you so' look*. (Müller 1978, 155)
d. He gave *what in stage directions is sometimes called a "dark laugh"* and snuffed once […]. (Müller 1978, 152)

Renský (1966, 296) includes the following example with multiple modification in his definition of the phenomenon:

(8) a. John gave a *short* laugh of *royal scorn*.
b. *John laughed *shortly*, *royally*, *scornfully*. (Renský 1966, 296)

We would exclude such an example because it does not satisfy the criterion of semantic correspondence between the light verb construction and the simplex verb construction. Note that in (8a), the semantic relation between the adjective *short* and the noun *scorn* is completely different from the one between the corresponding adverb *shortly* and the lexical item *scornfully* in (8b). In a similar vein, we also discarded from our set of data the examples with multiple modification shown in (9):

(9) a. In the process, it has forced distribution agents and carry and forward agents to take a *whole new* look at things […]. (*The Statesman*, 26.5.2003)
b. Take a *good hard* look at the registered madrasas, which have been provided unlimited state funds without accountability. (*The Statesman*, 10.2.2002)
c. But he used the new vision very intelligently to take a *fresh new* look at our surroundings. (*The Statesman*, 14.2.2004)

Instances of multiple modification with two adjectives were included, however, if the corresponding simplex verb allowed a coordinated adverb phrase, as in (10a) and (10b):

(10) a. […] diplomats in Delhi are taking a "*long close look*" at their security. (*The Statesman*, 17.10.2003)
b. Brian Lara must take a *long*, *hard* look at himself. (*The Statesman*, 2.8.2004)

Sometimes, it seemed at first as if a corresponding adverb was not available, as in examples (11a) to (11c). A *Google*-search for *telephonically*, however, shows that this adverb is readily available in IndE; see (11d) to (11f):

(11) a. Earlier on 28 April, the two prime ministers had a *telephonic* talk on the desirability and importance of people-to-people contacts between the two countries. (*The Statesman*, 2.1.2004)
b. He had a *telephonic* talk with the Jammu and Kashmir chief minister before he came to Parliament […]. (*The Statesman*, 2.8.2002)
c. But he admitted having a *telephonic* talk with BJP MLA Mr Virendra Pandey via Mr Kunte, a BJP-turned-Congress MP. (*The Statesman*, 7.12.2003)
d. The office of the JS (G), Ministry of Defence was also *telephonically* contacted about the request […]. (<www.ndmindia.nic.in>, 17.9.2007)
e. The main objective to take out the list was to monitor them *telephonically* by a lady telephone operator in the DC office. (<www.hsprodindia.nic.in>, 17.9.2007)
f. On some occasions such complaints may be given directly by the Systems Incharge on non-working days/off duty hours or in emergency *telephonically*. (<www.centralexcisechennai.gov.in>, 17.9.2007)

While we did include LVCs with internal adjectival premodification,[11] we excluded patterns in which nominal elements premodified the deverbal

[11] Sometimes it was difficult to decide whether premodification in an example would still count as 'adjectival'. In these cases, however, the criterion of adjective-adverb correspondence would usually lead us to exclude doubtful cases. In the example "Reportedly, Mr Ghisingh *had a half-an-hour telephonic talk* with chief minister Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee yesterday" (*The Statesman*, 3.3.2005), *half-an-hour* is in between nominal and adjectival premodification in the sense of 'intersective gradience' (see Aarts 2007, 124ff.); the example was excluded from our data set because *half-an-hour* cannot be used as an adverb in a

noun (as in the examples under 12), on the grounds that such complex nouns did not meet our condition of isomorphism between simplex verb and deverbal noun.

(12) a. Take a deep *inhalation jump* […]. (ICE-Ind, w2e 003)
b. […] Intach in the meanwhile proposed to Calcutta Tramways that a tram car be made available for tourists to take a *heritage tram ride* to view some of the city's attractions. (*The Statesman*, 15.2.2002)
c. Imran to give *pep talk* to Inzy & Co. (*The Statesman*, 26.2.2005)
d. Whenever elections are held we give a *boycott call*, and they do this to keep us away. (*Daily News*, 7.12.2002)

Dixon (2005, 465f.) introduces another criterion to distinguish LVCs from similar patterns, namely the preservation of peripheral constituents. He points out that *Mary gave the table a coat of wax* is not a LVC because the peripheral constituent a *coat of wax* does not correspond to the constituent in the related *Mary coated the table with wax*. We decided to include cases with only minimal changes (like a different preposition or no preposition at all). Where the simplex verb construction would require an additional constituent, as exemplified in (13), we also excluded the LVC:

(13) a. Media reports this time said she was willing to *take a* different *view*. (*The Statesman*, 14.6.2003)
b. While the media was in full attendance, secretariat employees, largely women, skipped work to *have a glimpse*. (*The Statesman*, 4.7.2003)
c. It's part of our job to *take a risk*. (*The Statesman*, 26.4.2003)

In addition to the formal criteria, our LVCs also have to be semantically equivalent to the simplex verb. In other words, idioms such as *have a say in something* and *take a stand on something* were excluded as they are not semantic variants of the related simplex verbs.[12]

An unsystematic browse through the Indian component of the *International Corpus of English* (ICE-India) revealed that in IndE, different light verbs may be used from the ones that are preferred in BrE or AmE, as in the following example, where *give* is used instead of *have* (BrE) or *take* (AmE):

(14) Now if you *give a look* at the figures […]. (ICE-India s1b 040)[13]

LVCs in IndE may also display deverbal nouns that are not attested in the two major reference varieties (see examples 1c and 3 above).

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related construction with a simplex verb but has to be rephrased as a prepositional phrase.

[12] See also Dixon (2005, 463), who points out that the LVC and the construction with the simplex verbs have to be semantically equivalent, which does not apply to *I had a chance to see her* vs. *I chanced to see her*.

[13] This might only be an occasional variant in IndE; in ICE-India, 22 instances illustrate the typical British collocation with *have*, 17 the variant with *take* (preferred in AmE). Larger amounts of data will be needed to verify this point.

In addition to the 'traditional' LVCs mentioned above, we also included constructions with *have*, *take* or *give* that are followed by a deverbal noun without an intervening indefinite article.[14] What these likely candidates for indigenized 'light verbs' share with the traditional LVCs is that they could be replaced by the verb that is converted into a noun in the LVC. The following examples from ICE-India illustrate this type of construction:

(15) a. Therefore madam some changes have been brought by this government […] to *give boost* to the infrastructure industry. (ICE-India s1b 052)
b. […] she was determined to *give* him hot *chase*. (ICE-India w2f 002)[15]
c. We had a session of passages and he *had look* through. (ICE-India, s1a 091)

Other possible candidates for nativization are variants with the definite instead of the indefinite article, such as shown in (16):

(16) Brokers said that market rebounded after it had *taken the dip* for several sessions. (*Daily Times*, 17.8.2006)

In BrE and AmE, these variants are not possible (see Dixon 2005, 463). But since they are used alongside constructions with indefinite *a* in IndE, we also included them in our definition of the variable.

To sum up, the LVCs in our study include only those patterns where the light verbs *have*, *take* and *give* are followed by an indefinite, a definite or a zero-article, and a deverbal noun that is isomorphic with a corresponding simplex verb. All examples have to have semantically equivalent and structurally corresponding simplex constructions. This excludes, among others, nominal premodification as well as clausal postmodification of the deverbal noun. LVCs with *give* may or may not have a direct object between the light verb and the deverbal noun.

### 2.2 *The data: web-derived corpora of South Asian Englishes*

Since no large-scale corpora like the *British National Corpus* (*BNC*) are available for South Asian Englishes, we chose to make use of the extensive archives of national newspapers that are easily accessible on the Internet.[16] This was also the approach used in Mukherjee and Hoffmann

[14] Zero articles are quite commonly used in IndE (see Sedlatschek 2009, 197–227); Sharma's (2005) sociolinguistic study of first-generation immigrants from India in the US indicates that zero determiners are a feature that is retained in the diaspora, even by speakers who are otherwise close to using standard, native-like English.

[15] Again, the sequence *hotly chased* is attested on the World Wide Web (in IndE but also on pages from the US and the UK).

[16] Occasionally, we also employed Google searches to verify our intuitions on a particular point of usage, especially for the South Asian Englishes.

(2006), where we – as we believe, successfully – used 32 million words of the Calcutta-based newspaper *The Statesman* to investigate differences in verb complementation between BrE and IndE. The *Statesman Archive* also forms the IndE basis of our present study. After identifying suitably comparable newspapers from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – e.g. they had to be quality newspapers rather than tabloids – we automatically downloaded their complete archives and extracted the actual news items from their surrounding boilerplate elements (e.g. links to other news items, advertisements, etc.). In addition, we also tried to identify, as far as possible, news items which were provided by international news services (e.g. Reuters, DPA). For some newspapers, these account for almost half of all news items, and they were simply discarded. Finally, since we needed to be able to search for syntactic patterns, the converted data was then part-of-speech tagged using EngCG (Karlsson *et al.* 1995). Table 1 lists the newspapers used for the present study; the 8.6 million words of (quality) newspapers and periodicals contained in the *BNC* represent the British basis of our data.

Table 1: Newspaper corpora of the five varieties

| Country | Newspaper(s) | Number of words |
|---|---|---|
| Bangladesh | *Daily Star* | 33,074,337 |
| India | *The Statesman* | 32,948,208 |
| Pakistan | *Daily Times* | 55,961,050 |
| Sri Lanka | *Daily News* | 26,138,250 |
| UK | *Independent, Guardian, Daily Telegraph*, etc. | 8,617,465 |
| Total | | 156,739,310 |

### *2.3 Retrieval*

A comprehensive analysis of all LVCs in the five varieties was beyond the scope of this pilot study. Instead, we decided to focus on those constructions that occur with a particularly high frequency. Since our investigation wants to test whether IndE has developed – or is in the process of developing – into a new epicentre in South Asia, we therefore started by retrieving a list of potentially relevant constructions from the *Statesman Archive* by compiling a frequency list of all sequences where the verbs *give*, *have*, or *take* are followed by a de-verbal noun (with an optional article). In the case of the ditransitive verb *give*, we of course also allowed an optional (simple) noun phrase to occur between the verb and the de-verbal noun. In sum, we searched for: (a) (*take*|*takes*|*taking*|*took*|*have*|*has*|*had*|*having*) → (*a*|*the*)? → de-verbal noun, and (b) for (*give*|*gives*|*giving*|*gave*) → (NP)? → (*a*|*the*)? → de-verbal noun. De-verbal nouns were identified by consulting a lemma-wordform database of the written part of the BNC:

if the wordform was tagged at least 50 times each as both verb and noun in the BNC, it was deemed to be a potential de-verbal noun.

After manually discarding unwanted constructions, we isolated 14 frequent de-verbal nouns for further analysis in the five varieties: *look*, *boost*, *glimpse*, *turn*, *talk*, *call*, *rest*, *taste*, *ride*, *walk*, *dip*, *view*, *fight*, *risk*. In order to capture possible variations in the construction (e.g. various forms of pre-modification of the de-verbal noun), we employed a fairly general retrieval strategy: we searched for all instances where *give*, *have*, or *take* were followed by one of the 14 nouns within seven words. Since the corpora were available in tagged format, we were to some extent able to exclude irrelevant data, e.g. by discarding instances where the (potential) de-verbal noun was preceded by a modal verb. The remaining sentences were then manually categorised with respect to the interchangeability of the LVC with their simple verbal variant (see above, section 2.1).

## 3. Results

### *3.1 Overall frequencies*

Figure 1 gives a bird's eye view of our findings, i.e. all LVCs with *HAVE, TAKE* and *GIVE*, but separately for those that have the indefinite article, a zero-article, or *the*.

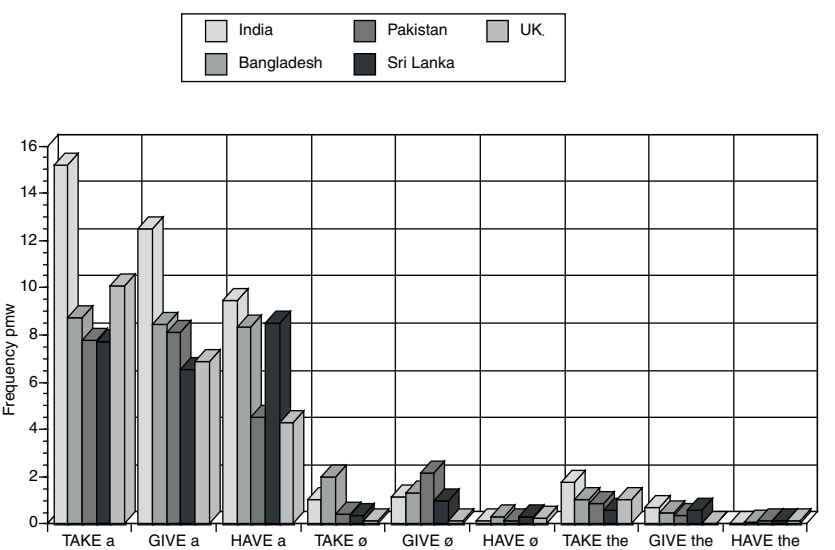


Fig. 1: LVCs in South Asian Englishes and BrE (frequency per million words)

This figure shows that the more 'exotic' patterns like *give Ø boost* and *take the walk* are really minority variants in IndE and in the other South Asian Englishes we included in our study. We will return to the variants with a zero-article below.

The results for the more prototypical LVCs, i.e. those with the indefinite article, show that all LVCs are used consistently more often in IndE than in all other varieties. Otherwise, the results do not present a clear-cut pattern. We therefore decided to pool all prototypical LVCs together. The results are presented in Figure 2:

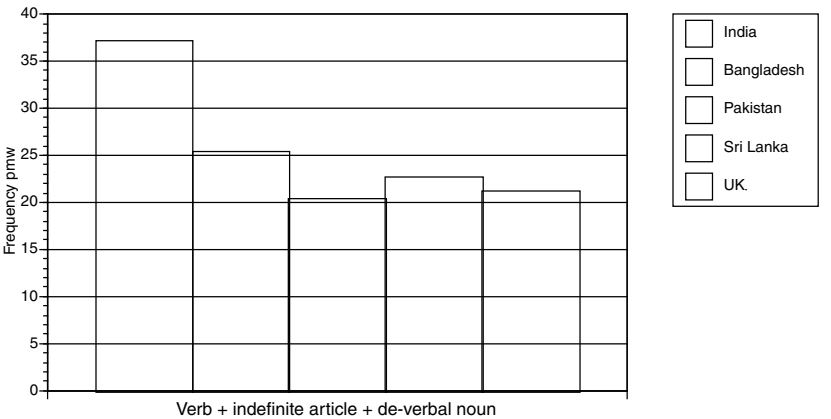


Fig. 2: Prototypical LVCs with *take*, *give* and *have*: pooled frequencies (per million words)

For the interpretation of these data it will be useful to remember that the most frequent deverbal nouns in the *Statesman Archive* served as the benchmark for our retrieval strategy. It is therefore hardly surprising that IndE appears as the variety with the highest frequency of LVCs. The results from the other Asian newspaper archives are much closer to the British data.

Light verb constructions of the type *take a look, have a walk* and *give sb. a call* are colloquial patterns (see Wierzbicka 1982, 766; Rohdenburg 1990, 137; Dixon 2005, 461),[17] and colloquialisms are likely to be avoided

[17] Other linguists (e.g. Renský 1966, 297; Brinton 1996, 189) claim that LVCs are particularly frequent in scientific texts. Note, however, that Renský and Brinton include constructions with abstract deverbal nouns in their definition. Constructions like *give consideration* or *make a decision* might really be more frequent in specialised discourse. LVCs with deverbal nouns like *chat, cuddle, drink, guess, laugh* and *look* would obviously be more frequent in everyday colloquial language use. Allerton (2002, 29) is probably right in claiming that some constructions are typical of scientific, others of colloquial language.

in the written usage of non-institutionalised and learner varieties of English (see Nesselhauf 2005). In other words, the data in Figure 2 may indicate that English in India is a fully institutionalised variety, whereas the other L2-varieties are still in the process of becoming institutionalised.[18]

### 3.2 *Variable contexts*

Of particular interest are LVCs with deverbal nouns that can be combined with different light verbs without changing the semantic content of the construction. Two cases in point are the deverbal nouns *look* and *rest*: *look* can be combined with *have*, *take* and *give*; *rest* can be combined with *have* and *take*. Figure 3 shows the distribution of the three *look*-variants across the five corpora; Figure 4 shows the distribution of the two *rest*-variants.

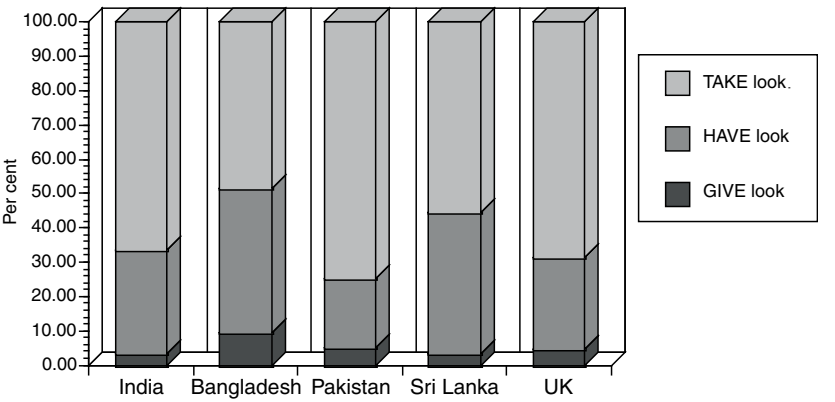


Fig. 3: LVCs with variable use of *take*, *have* and *give* in five varieties of English (relative frequencies)

For the *look*-variants, no uniform pattern can be identified. For the *rest*-patterns, however, a somewhat clearer picture emerges: *take* + *rest* is the preferred choice in all South Asian Englishes, whereas in BrE *have* + *rest* is used in 50% of all cases. However, given the fairly low raw frequency of this pattern in our data, the findings presented in Figure 4 will require back-up from a larger data-base.

[18] See also Nesselhauf (2009, 23): "There may also be a positive correlation between the degree of institutionalization and the degree of difference to learner English."

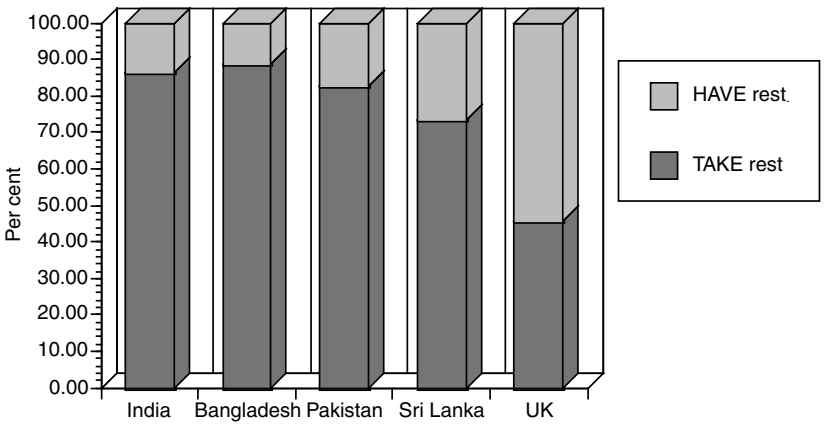


Fig. 4: LVCs with variable use of *take* and *have* in five varieties of English (relative frequencies)

### *3.3 Nativised patterns*

Another interesting category of LVCs are those that also occur with a Ø-article. They are also attested, albeit rarely, in the BNC. A typical South Asian example is shown in (17):

(17) We really need to *give boost* to our export to maintain their competitiveness. (*Daily Star*, 9.12.2005)

As Figure 5 shows, they occur most frequently in our Bangladesh data and

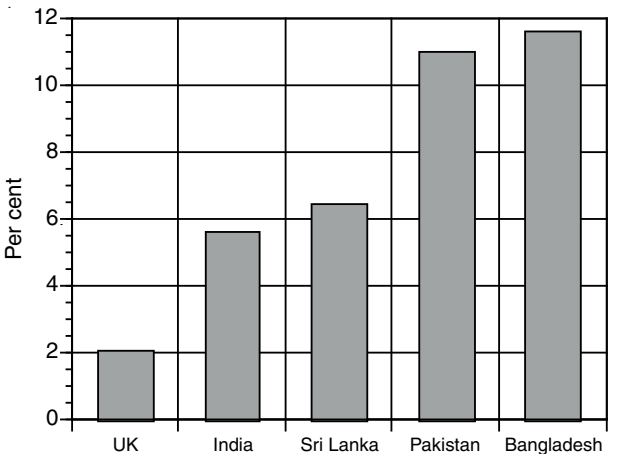


Fig. 5: LVCs with Ø-article

least frequently in Sri Lanka. In between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, we find India and Pakistan. Note that Ø-article LVCs are low-frequency phenomena in all corpora, so that the quantitative differences in Figure 5 have to be interpreted with a measure of caution.

The findings in Figure 5 provide us with a mixed picture, and it is difficult to find a single reason for the quantitative data. It might well be that different factors are at work here. IndE as an institutionalised second-language variety deviates from BrE in so far as it allows for more Ø-article LVCs. In Sri Lanka we find slightly more Ø-article LVCs than in IndE. Pakistani and Bangladeshi English show much higher frequencies of the Ø-article variants. It is difficult to provide a unified account for this, however, because the status of English in the two countries is markedly different. In Pakistan, English is one of the official languages and there are a substantial number of people (the educated elite) who routinely use it as a second language. In Bangladesh, by contrast, the degree of entrenchment of English is much lower. It is a widely monolingual country with Bengali spoken by more than 90 percent of the population; English is not needed as an intra-national link language, and it has no official status either. It thus does not play the same role in the education system as in the other countries. English in Bangladesh, one could argue, is a foreign language rather than a nativised second language – as a consequence, a lack of language competence on the part of Bangladeshi users of English might be at the root of many of the Ø-article LVCs. Admittedly, this is a speculative – and potentially controversial – claim. In view of the differences sketched above, this explanation obviously fails to account for the similarities between the Pakistani and Bangladeshi data. In a wider setting, this points to the – presumably unanswerable – question which of the divergent forms in our data are genuine regionalisms of South Asian Englishes and which of the forms are simply learner mistakes.[19]

A likely candidate for a South Asian regionalism is the LVC *to have a glimpse*. A look at Table 2 confirms that it is attested in all our Asian Englishes (albeit with low frequencies in Pakistan and Sri Lanka), but not at all in the British data.[20]

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[19] On the question of 'mistakes' vs. 'nativization', i.e. the distance or closeness of learner language and second language varieties, see also Nesselhauf (2009). Her results on co-occurrence phenomena indicate that those "phenomena that only display a low degree of idiomaticity and culture-boundedness tend to have similar characteristics across L2 and learner varieties" (2009, 22f.). The New Englishes in her study often occupied a position between the learner varieties and BrE. Nativisation, on the other hand, turned out to be more obvious in the area of new prepositional verbs.

[20] A *Google* search for this LVC provides many hits, also from the .uk domain, suggesting that *to have a glimpse* is by no means restricted to South Asian usage. Similarly, Gupta (2009) initially suspected certain patterns to be typical of Singaporean English that she later also found used in BrE or AmE (e.g. the progressive after strings like *This is the first time I*). We might be dealing with an instance of

Table 2: *HAVE glimpse* vs. *TAKE glimpse* in 5 varieties of English

| | India | Bangladesh | Pakistan | Sri Lanka | BrE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *HAVE glimpse* | 55 (1.77 pmw) | 51 (1.54 pmw) | 3 (0.05 pmw) | 18 (0.69 pmw) | Ø |
| *TAKE glimpse* | 3 (0.10 pmw) | 3 (0.10 pmw) | Ø | 3 (0.11 pmw) | Ø |

The results in Table 2 contradict, to some extent at least, the data shown in Figure 5, because the South Asian Englishes cluster in different ways. What is striking, however, is the relatively high frequency of *HAVE glimpse* in IndE – this is at least compatible with the epicentre hypothesis. Other examples of South Asian regionalisms are *take a view* and *give the call*. The pattern *have Ø rest* is only attested in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka; however, the very low frequencies in these varieties suggest that its absence from our Indian data cannot be turned into an argument for regional differences. Again, the question remains which of the forms are creative innovations and, thus, acceptable forms of the local lexicogrammars and which of them are learner language phenomena in the sense of ungrammatical usage.[21]

Finally, we found a LVC with a semantically unusual light verb in our Sri Lankan data:

(18) a. One day I meet the Korean executive who works for the garment factory close by, when he comes to *take a* phone *call* to my Aunt's house. (*Daily News*, 15.12.2001)
b. But when I asked to *take a call* to my office I was told that both parties were tapping the line. (*Daily News*, 20.2.2002)

The reason for this regionalism is most likely due to the interference from the two substrate languages, Sinhala and Tamil. In both languages, the equivalent of English *take* (namely *ganne* and *edukke*) can be used in the sense of 'make a call'. In other words, in Sri Lankan English, influence

secondary language or dialect contact here, i.e. South Asian Englishes (like IndE) might be the source of a new LVC that has since spread to BrE. The main point that would support such an argument is that the LVC is amply attested in the South Asian part of our comparable dataset but not in the BrE part of our corpus, which contains data only up to the early 1990s. See also Kerswill *et al.* (2008) and Gabrielatos *et al.* (2010) on an analysis of features of what has been termed "Multicultural London English" (MLE), i.e. a variety of English currently developing in certain areas of inner London. MLE displays the highest degree of innovation among speakers with friendship networks consisting of mixed cultural backgrounds, including for example (second-generation) speakers of Bangladeshi origin.

[21] The problem of distinguishing between features and errors is also mentioned in Mesthrie & Bhatt (2008, 156ff.) and discussed in greater detail in the contributions in Mukherjee & Hundt (2011).

from the first language (either Sinhala or Tamil) is likely to have produced semantic broadening of *take* as exemplified in the usage under (18).[22]

It is probably at the level of individual LVCs that we are likely to find regionalisms common to the South Asian varieties investigated here and thus good candidates that would support our hypothesis; but we are also likely to find regional variation among the South Asian Englishes, as the case of *take a call* (for the 'global' variant *give/make a call*) in Sri Lankan English shows.

### *3.4 Testing for variation among South Asian Englishes*

As previously mentioned, the list of LVCs considered in this paper was derived from a comparison of our Indian data with the newspaper texts in the BNC. As a consequence of this, our analysis might have missed LVCs that are frequently used in one or more of the other South Asian varieties but that are not (or only rarely) found in Indian or British English. This in turn could have a serious impact on the interpretation of our findings in the context of the epicentre hypothesis. We therefore modified the retrieval script described in section 2.3 to find potential LVCs in the Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Sri Lankan data that were not attested at all in the newspaper texts of the BNC. Only constructions with 5 or more instances in any of the corpora were considered.

While this procedure indeed retrieved a number of potentially interesting verb-noun collocations, almost none of these was fully compatible with the definition of the variable as presented in section 2.1. Thus, we for example did not consider *take benefit* to be a prototypical LVC, since no instances of *take a benefit* were attested in the data. It is nevertheless worth noting that in the Pakistani data alone, a total of 34 instances are found, while Bangladesh and Sri Lanka together contribute a further seven cases of this construction. Two typical uses are shown in (19) and (20):

(19) He urged the Microsoft to *take benefit* of the incentives being provided to foreign investors in the IT sector. (*Daily Times*, 10.6.2003)

(20) However, the commission has also decided to allow the federal and provincial government employees to *take benefit* from the private pension funds scheme. (*Daily Times*, 1.6.2004)

Of these two examples, (20) is no doubt the more interesting use: as a search in the full BNC as well as on the World Wide Web reveals, the construction *take benefit of*, as in example (19), is reasonably common in inner-circle varieties of English. However, *take benefit from* is clearly less frequent overall (and non-existent in the BNC), and a considerable proportion of the instances returned by a Google search suggest that their source may be South Asian. It thus appears to us that *take benefit from* is

[22] Prof. Ruqaiya Raheem (personal communication).

a good candidate for an innovation that may have developed – and become fossilised – in contact varieties of English in analogy to existing LVCs. However, as indicated above, it nevertheless cannot be counted among the prototypical LVCs considered for the present study.

Other constructions that were discarded after brief consideration include *have plan* and *have lack*, as exemplified in (21) and (22):

(21) Biman Managing Director Mahmoodur Rahman yesterday said it *has plan* to further increase fuel surcharge because of rising prices. (*Daily Star*, 3.9.2004)

(22) Yes, at the moment we *have lack* of venues to arrange the meet as Mirpur won't be ready in time. (*Daily Star*, 9.7.2005)

In both cases, a corresponding variant with an indefinite article certainly exists; however, the verb *have* is not as semantically empty as would be the case in a prototypical LVC. Instead, both (21) and (22) express situations in which a very literal meaning of *have* – i.e. 'possess' – is foregrounded. Both constructions are virtually restricted to the Bangladeshi data, albeit in sufficient frequencies to make an interpretation of this use as a non-native error appear fairly unlikely.

The only clear candidate for LVC-status discovered by extending our retrieval script is *take (a) lease*, as exemplified in (23):

(23) Local Khasia leaders also said they had *taken lease* of the land and have been paying taxes to the government. (*Daily Star*, 7.8.2005)

(24) Abul Kashem was arrested following the filing of a case by one Golam Kibria who planted the tress after *taking a lease* from the Roads and Highways Department. (*Daily Star*, 21.8.2005)

Again, the use of this construction is largely restricted to the Bangladeshi data, where a total of 27 instances were found; the Indian data contains a mere 4 occurrences, which explains why it had previously escaped our attention. Interestingly, the prototypical variant with an indefinite article is in fact much less frequent overall: a total of only 4 instances are attested in our corpora, including (24), which is one of the two examples from Bangladesh. Given this unusual preference for the variant without an article – cf. Figure 1 above – it might be argued that *take (a) lease* should not be counted among the list of prototypical LVCs, either. In sum, there do not appear to be any prototypical LVCs that are restricted to our Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Sri Lankan data.

## 4. Conclusion

Firstly and most importantly, our data do not allow any substantial conclusions as far as the epicentre hypothesis is concerned. True, most of our results with regard to LVCs are compatible with the emergence of IndE as a model variety for neighbouring South Asian varieties. In particular, the distribution of the prototypical LVCs with *give*, *have*, and *take* across our corpora indicates that IndE clearly is an endo-normatively stabilised vari-

ety marked by substantial divergence from BrE – which certainly is a prerequisite for epicentre status. But we would have to look at many more forms and structures in the lexicogrammar of South Asian Englishes in order to be able to assess the epicentre status of IndE on a solid basis.

Secondly, most of our findings make it clear that English in South Asia is not an entirely homogeneous variety across the entire subcontinent – the label 'South Asian English', which is used, for example, by Baumgardner (1996) and Kachru (2005), is, therefore, potentially misleading. It makes sense, in our view, to describe in much more detail the use of English in the individual South Asian countries – and, accordingly, to speak of 'South Asian Englishes'.[23]

Thirdly, we have shown how web-derived corpora can be utilised for a description of the lexicogrammar of New Englishes (such as South Asian Englishes) for which standard corpora are not available and the available descriptions of which are often based on intuitive data and anecdotal evidence. We believe that our web-derived corpora of South Asian newspapers provide a very suitable database for future research into the use of English in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Finally, we are fully aware that it will be necessary to complement corpus analyses with sociolinguistic and attitudinal data on the status and role of various models of English in South Asia. If, for example, IndE is turning more and more into a model for newspaper English in neighbouring South Asian countries (as suggested by the epicentre hypothesis), it should be possible to trace the orientation towards IndE as a lead variety in language users' attitudes towards IndE and their assessment of IndE usage.

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[23] For further support of this view, see also the papers in Lim & Gisborne (2009).

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